

~~Secret~~*Setting the Record Straight*

## CIA and the Guatemala Assassination Proposals, 1952-1954 (s)

**Gerald K. Haines**

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*Author's Note:* During a thorough review of CIA records relating to Operation PBSUCCESS, an operation designed to get rid of the Jacobo Arbenz Guzman regime in Guatemala in 1954, Center for the Study of Intelligence (CSI) reviewers in 1995 uncovered a sensitive file of material pertaining to proposals for the assassination or limitation of Guatemala Communist leaders, including President Arbenz.<sup>1</sup> Researching the background or provenance of the file, CIA historians discovered that the records had not been included in a CIA Inspector General report of 1967 on alleged assassination plotting or in the 1976 Church Committee investigation volumes on CIA assassination plotting. In addition, the entire Guatemala collection had been pulled together from CIA records in response to a Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request in 1979. (U)

Further research revealed that the 1979 Agency-wide review for the FOIA request had found several documents relating to discussions and proposals regarding assassination, elimination, disposal, and executive action proposals against Guatemalan officials. The original reviewers separated the sensitive documents and placed them in a separate (b)(3)(n) envelope. They also informed Deputy Director of Operations John McMahon and DCI Adm. Stansfield Turner of the material. McMahon ordered name traces on all the Guatemalans mentioned to determine if, in fact, any of them had been assassinated. The traces turned up no evidence of assassination. The Intelligence Oversight Board and the

Congressional oversight committees also were informed about the documents and the name traces. (U)

Here the matter rested until the records were rediscovered during the CSI review of 1995. CIA historians further determined that the PBSUCCESS material was an artificial collection of documents that broke the original provenance of the recordkeeping system of the Directorate of Operations (DO), and the further separation of the sensitive materials distorted the overall interpretation of the records by removing them from their original context. The Director of CSI, Brian Latell, after notifying the Executive Director of CIA, the White House, the NSC, and the Department of State, ordered a page-by-page review of the entire DO collection and other Directorate records relating to PBSUCCESS for additional documents mentioning assassination, elimination, disposal, or executive action suggestions or proposals with regard to Guatemala in the early 1950s. With all the records identified and their proper file location noted, Latell then asked the CIA History Staff to undertake a thorough analysis of the materials to determine exactly what the CIA role was in assassination planning for PBSUCCESS. The following article tries to detail CIA's role in the proposals and to place the assassination planning proposals in their proper historical context.<sup>2</sup> (U)

In the early 1950s, the CIA directed covert operations aimed at removing the government of Jacobo Arbenz Guzman from power in Guatemala. Included in these efforts were various suggestions for the disposal of key

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Arbenz government officials and Guatemalan Communists. The Agency drew up lists of individuals for assassination, discussed training Guatemalan exiles for assassination teams, and conducted intimidation programs against prominent Guatemalan officials. (U)

This brief article traces, in a chronological manner, the injection of assassination planning and proposals into the PBFORTUNE covert operation against the Arbenz government in 1952 and into the PBSUCCESS operation in 1954. It tries to illustrate the depth of such planning and the level of involvement of Agency officials. It also details where the proposals originated, who approved them, and how advanced the preparations for such actions were. Finally, the study examines the implementation of such planning and the results, that is, were any Arbenz officials or Guatemalan Communists killed as a result of CIA or US assassination planning? The article is based almost exclusively on DO records relating to PBFORTUNE and PBSUCCESS. (U)

### **Background**

As early as 1952, US policymakers viewed the government of President Arbenz with some alarm. Although he had been popularly elected in 1950, growing Communist influence within his government gave rise to concern in the United States that Arbenz had established an effective working alliance with the Communists. Moreover, Arbenz's policies had damaged US business interests in Guatemala; a sweeping agrarian reform called for the expropriation and redistribution of much of the United Fruit Company's land.<sup>3</sup>

## “ **CIA and Intelligence Community reports tended to support the view that Guatemala and the Arbenz regime were rapidly falling under the sway of the Communists.** ”

Although most high-level US officials recognized that a hostile government in Guatemala by itself did not constitute a direct security threat to the United States, they viewed events there in the context of the growing global Cold War struggle with the Soviet Union and feared that Guatemala could become a client state from which the Soviets could project power and influence throughout the Western Hemisphere.<sup>4</sup> (S)

CIA and Intelligence Community (IC) reports tended to support the view that Guatemala and the Arbenz regime were rapidly falling under the sway of the Communists.<sup>5</sup> DCI Walter Bedell Smith and other Agency officials believed the situation called for action. Their assessment was, that without help, the Guatemalan opposition would remain inept, disorganized, and ineffective. The anti-Communist elements—the Catholic hierarchy, landowners, business interests, the railway workers' union, university students, and the Army—were prepared to prevent a Communist accession to power, but they had little outside support.<sup>6</sup> (S)

Other US officials, especially in the Department of State, urged a more cautious approach. The Bureau of

Inter-American Affairs, for example, did not want to present “the spectacle of the elephant shaking with alarm before the mouse.” It wanted a policy of firm persuasion with the withholding of virtually all cooperative assistance, and the concluding of military defense assistance pacts with El Salvador, Nicaragua, and Honduras.<sup>7</sup> Although the Department of State position became the official public US policy, the CIA assessment of the situation had support within the Truman administration as well. This led to the development of PBFORTUNE. (U)

### **PBFORTUNE**

Following a visit to Washington by Nicaraguan President Anastasio Somoza in April 1952, in which Somoza boasted that if provided arms he and Guatemalan exile Carlos Castillo Armas could overthrow Arbenz, President Truman asked DCI Smith to investigate the possibility. Smith sent a case officer from the Directorate of Plans (DDP) to contact Guatemalan dissidents about armed action against the Arbenz regime.<sup>8</sup> After seeing the case officer's report,<sup>9</sup> J. C. King, Chief of the Western Hemisphere Division of the DDP, proposed to DDCI Allen Dulles that the Agency supply Castillo Armas with arms and \$225,000 and that Nicaragua and Honduras furnish the Guatemalans with air support.<sup>10</sup> Gaining Department of State support, Smith, on 9 September 1952, officially approved King's request to initiate operation PBFORTUNE to aid Guatemalan exiles in overthrowing Arbenz. Planning for PBFORTUNE lasted barely a month, however, when Smith terminated it after he learned in October that it had been blown.<sup>11</sup> (S)

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Throughout the planning for PBFORTUNE, there were proposals for assassination. Even months before the official approval of PBFORTUNE, DDP officers compiled a "hit list." Working from an old 1949 Guatemalan Army list of Communists and information supplied by the Directorate of Intelligence, in January 1952 DDP officers compiled a list of "top flight Communists whom the new government would desire to eliminate immediately in event of a successful anti-Communist coup."

Headquarters asked the (b)(3)(c) to verify the list and recommend any additions or deletions.<sup>12</sup> Headquarters also asked (b)(3)(c) to verify a list of an additional 16 Communists and/or sympathizers whom the new government would desire to incarcerate immediately if the coup succeeded.<sup>13</sup>

(b)(1) (b)(3)(c) in Guatemala added three names to the list in his reply.<sup>14</sup> Nine months later, the case officer forwarded to Headquarters a disposal list compiled by Castillo Armas. That list called for the execution through executive action of 58 Guatemalans (Category I) and the imprisonment or exile of 74 additional Guatemalans (Category II).<sup>15</sup> The case officer also reported at the same time, 18 September 1952, that Gen. Rafael Trujillo, the dictator of the Dominican Republic, had agreed to aid Castillo Armas in return for the "killing of four Santo Dominicans at present residing in Guatemala a few days before D-Day." According to the case officer, Castillo Armas readily agreed, but cautioned that it could not be done before D-Day because of security reasons. Castillo Armas further added that his own plans included similar action and that special squads were already being trained.<sup>16</sup> There is no record that

Headquarters took any action regarding Castillo Armas's list. (S)

After the PBFORTUNE operation was officially terminated, the Agency continued to pick up reports of assassination planning by the Guatemalan opposition. In late November 1952, for example, an opposition Guatemalan leader, in a conversation with the case officer, confirmed that Castillo Armas had special K Groups whose mission was to kill all leading political and military leaders, and that the hit list with the location of the homes and offices of all targets had already been drawn up.<sup>17</sup> On 12 December, the case officer reported further that Castillo Armas planned to make maximum use of the K Groups.<sup>18</sup>

Another source subsequently reported that Nicaraguan, Honduran, and Salvadoran soldiers in civilian clothes would infiltrate Guatemala and assassinate unnamed Communist leaders.<sup>19</sup> (S)

In addition to monitoring events in Guatemala, the Agency continued to try to influence developments and to float ideas for disposing of key figures in the Arbenz government. J. C. King in 1953 proposed not only to focus on sabotage, defection, penetration, and propaganda efforts with regard to Guatemala, but also to

eliminate Arbenz himself. According to King's draft memorandum, after creating a story that Arbenz was preparing to oust the Communists, he could be eliminated. His assassination would be "laid to the Commies" and used to bring about a mass defection of the Guatemalan Army.<sup>20</sup> A Western Hemisphere Division memo of 28 August 1953 also suggested possibly assassinating key Guatemalan military officers if they refused to be converted to the rebel cause.<sup>21</sup> In September 1953, King also sent Allen Dulles, now DCI, an updated plan of action which included a reference to "neutralizing" key Guatemalan military leaders.<sup>22</sup> (S)

In the psychological warfare area, Guatemala sent

(b)(3)(c) all leading Communists in Guatemala, "death notice" cards for 30 straight days beginning 15 April 1953. (b)(3)(c) repeated the operation beginning 15 June 1953, but it reported no reaction from the targeted leaders.<sup>23</sup> (S)

#### PBSUCCESS

By the fall of 1953, US policymakers, including CIA officials, were searching for a new overall program for dealing with Arbenz. The Guatemalan leader had moved even closer to the Communists. He had expropriated additional United Fruit Company holdings, legalized the Guatemalan Communist Party, the PGT, and suppressed anti-Communist opposition following an abortive uprising at Salamá. In response, the NSC authorized a covert action operation against Arbenz and gave the CIA primary responsibility.<sup>24</sup> (U)

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**CIA planning for  
sabotage teams in early  
1954 also included  
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assassinations.**

The CIA plan, as drawn up by J. C. King's Western Hemisphere Division, combined psychological warfare and economic, diplomatic, and paramilitary actions against Guatemala. Named PBSUCCESS and coordinated with the Department of State, the plan's stated objective was "to remove covertly, and without bloodshed if possible, the menace of the present Communist-controlled Government of Guatemala." In the outline of the operation, the sixth stage called for the "rollup" of Communists and collaborators after a successful coup.<sup>25</sup> (S)

Dulles placed Frank Wisner in charge of PBSUCCESS and sent a senior DDP officer, (b)(3)(c) to establish a temporary (LINCOLN), in Florida, to coordinate the planning and execution of PBSUCCESS. Other key Agency figures involved were King and Tracy Barnes, chief of the Political and Paramilitary Operations Staff. Department of State officials Henry Holland, Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs; Raymond Leddy, from the office of Middle American Affairs; and James Lampton Berry, State liaison to the Agency also played major roles. (U)

### Training

Although assassination was not mentioned specifically in the overall plan, the chief of Paramilitary Operations, LINCOLN, requested on 5 January 1954 a special paper on liquidation of personnel. This paper, according to the paramilitary chief, was to be used to brief the training chief for PBSUCCESS before he left to begin training Castillo Armas's forces in Honduras on 10 January 1954. A cable from LINCOLN the following

day requested 20 silencers (converters) for .22-caliber rifles. Headquarters sent the rifles.<sup>26</sup> The paramilitary chief also discussed the training plan with the case officer on 13 January 1954, telling him that he wanted Castillo Armas and the PBSUCCESS training officer to train two assassins. In addition, he discussed these "assassination specialists" with Castillo Armas on 3 February 1954.<sup>27</sup> (S)

The idea of forming assassination teams (K Groups) apparently originated with Castillo Armas in 1952. Adapting Castillo Armas's concept, the paramilitary chief routinely included two assassination specialists in his training plans.<sup>28</sup> (S)

CIA planning for sabotage teams in early 1954 also included creating a K Group trained to perform assassinations. The main mission of the sabotage teams or harassment teams, however, was to attack local Communists and Communist property and to avoid attacks on the Army.<sup>29</sup> A chart depicting the paramilitary chief's plan for the CALLIGERIS (Castillo Armas) organization showed the K Group. It was distributed in various paramilitary planning packets as late as the spring of 1954.<sup>30</sup> In June 1954, in a briefing for David Atlee Phillips, chief of SHERWOOD, the CIA's clandestine radiobroadcasting program aimed at the Arbenz regime, (b)(3)(c) also mentioned that sabotage teams would assassinate known

Communists in their areas once the invasion operation began.<sup>31</sup> (S)

### Psychological Warfare

As in PBFORTUNE, an intensive psychological warfare program paralleled the planning for paramilitary action. Using the anti-Communist network established by a Guatemalan dissident, the chief of Political and Psychological Operations at LINCOLN developed a major propaganda campaign against the Arbenz government. Part of this program included the sending of new mourning cards to top Communist leaders that lamented the imminent purge or execution of various Communists throughout the world and hinted of the forthcoming doom of the addressee. Death letters were also sent to top Guatemalan Communists such as (b)(3)(n) (b)(3)(n) (b)(3)(n) the Guatemalan (b)(1) prepared these letters for a dissident student leader. The "nerve war" against individuals," as it was called in Guatemala, also included sending wooden coffins, hangman's nooses, and phony bombs to select individuals. Such slogans as "Here Lives a Spy" and "You Have Only 5 Days" were painted on their houses.<sup>32</sup> (S)

Wanting to go beyond mere threats, the dissident student leader suggested that the "violent disposal" of one of the top Guatemalan Communists would have a positive effect on the resistance movement and undermine Communist morale. The dissident leader's recommendations called for the formation of a covert action group to perform violent, illegal acts against the government. LINCOLN cautioned the dissident leader, however, that such techniques

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CIA received further  
Department of State  
encouragement for  
assassination plotting  
in April 1954.  
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were designed to destroy a person's usefulness. By destroy, "We do not mean to kill the man," LINCOLN cabled the dissident leader. Responding to the proposal that a top

(b)(1) Communist leader be killed, (b)(3)(c) told LINCOLN he could not then recommend assassinating any "death letter" recipients because it might touch off "wholesale reprisals." Reiterating that the plan was "to scare, not kill," he nevertheless suggested that LINCOLN might want to "study the suggestion for utility now or in the future." <sup>33</sup> (s)

While Agency paramilitary and psychological warfare planning both included suggestions that inferred assassination proposals, these proposals appear never to have been implemented. The paramilitary chief had sought to use Castillo Armas's K Group scheme, but there was no State Department or White House support. Such was also the case when the subject of assassination emerged in high-level Agency and interagency planning discussions. (U)

#### Target Lists

A weekly PBSUCCESS meeting at Headquarters on 9 March 1954 considered the elimination of 15 to 20 of Guatemala's top leaders with "Trujillo's trained pisroleros." Those attending the meeting were Wisner; Barnes; (b)(3)(c); King; Richard Helms, the DP's Chief of Operations; and State Department representatives Berry and Leddy. Addressing the group, (b)(3)(c) while stating clearly that "such elimination was part of the plan and could be done," objected to the proposal at that time. (b)(3)(c) however, expressed the view that "knocking off the leaders might make

(b)(3)(c)

it possible for the Army to take over." <sup>34</sup> (s)

Following this meeting, (b)(3)(c) appears to be the Agency official who revived discussion of assassination as an option. On 25 March, he broached the subject with (b)(3)(c) Deputy Assistant Secretary for Inter-American Affairs, who had just returned from the OAS meeting in Caracas, Venezuela, that voted 17 to 1 to condemn Communism in Guatemala. With (b)(3)(c)

(b)(3)(c) again (b)(3)(c) asked (b)(3)(c) if he had changed his thinking since the conference on the possible methods to get rid of the Arbenz government.

(b)(3)(c) replied that in his opinion, "The elimination of those in high positions of the government would bring about its collapse." He then qualified his statement, according to (b)(3)(c) memo, by saying that perhaps "even a smaller number, say 20, would be sufficient." <sup>35</sup> (s)

Less than a week later, Allen Dulles visited LINCOLN on 31 March. The records do not indicate why Dulles flew to LINCOLN, <sup>36</sup> but on that date the LINCOLN officers were asked to draw up an updated target list. Criteria for inclusion on the disposal list required that individuals be (1) high government and organizational leaders "irrevocably implicated in Communist doctrine and policy," (2) "out-and-out proven Communist leaders," or (3) those few individuals

in key government and military positions of tactical importance "whose removal for psychological, organizational or other reasons is mandatory for the success of military action." <sup>37</sup> (s)

The paramilitary chief took the new list with him when he consulted Castillo Armas on 7 April 1954. Chief, LINCOLN (b)(3)(c) also borrowed a copy of the list on the same day. The paramilitary chief and Castillo Armas apparently discussed the list, and, at least tentatively, agreed that any assassination would take place during the actual invasion of Guatemala by Castillo Armas's forces. There was still no time date for the actual beginning of hostilities, however. (s) (b)(3)(c)

Agency contacts with conservative Guatemalan exile leader (b)(3)(n) (b)(3)(n) in El Salvador at the same time also produced an assassination list. (b)(3)(n) provided a CIA cutout with a list of Communist leaders he would like to see executed, but LINCOLN saw (b)(3)(n); a loose cannon. They did not want him to become involved in PBSUCCESS. <sup>39</sup> (s)

CIA received further Department of State encouragement for assassination plotting in April 1954. Fueling the fire for action (b)(3)(n) in a meeting with Wisner; Richard Bissell, Special Assistant to Dulles; Barnes; and another CIA officer concluded that "more drastic and definitive steps to overthrow the government [in Guatemala] must be taken." In response to a question of whether (b)(3)(n) (b)(3)(n) as "salvageable," (b)(3)(n) replied in the negative and suggested that "he be eliminated." <sup>40</sup> (s)

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On 16 May 1954, the executive officer at LINCOLN proposed in a memorandum to

(b)(3)(c) LINCOLN, that assassination be incorporated into the psychological part of PBSUCCESS. The executive officer laid out a specific assassination schedule leading up to D-Day, the actual invasion by Castillo Armas. On D-12 he proposed a raid on "El Cajon," the *finca* of Arbenz. This was to be a show of force; no one was to be harmed, and the attack was to take place when Arbenz was absent from the plantation. On D-10, however, the executive officer proposed the disposal of (b)(3)(n)

as a means of paralyzing the Guardia and eliminating "the prime symbol of (b)(3)(n) oppression." On D-8, the executive officer suggested that (b)(3)(n) be killed. According to the executive officer, this would eliminate the police-state character of the Arbenz regime. On D-6, the executive officer called for the disposal (b)(3)(n)

(b)(3)(n)

(b)(3)(n)

the executive officer believed. On D-4, (b)(3)(n)

(b)(3)(n)

would be eliminated. On D-1 or D-Day, Arbenz himself was to be eliminated so that the rebel forces would not have to worry about him or deal with him after victory. The executive officer considered the possibility of reprisals as a weakness in his scheme, but he decided that "such actions were expected anyway." The executive officer argued that his proposal, if adopted, would not only be physically impressive but also psychologically significant by providing a

show of strength for the opposition. It would also "soften up" the enemy. He added that his first three suggestions had (b)(1)ious approval

(b)(3)(c) (b)(3)(c)

On 21 May, (b)(3)(c) asked Headquarters for permission to implement the executive officer's proposal and asked for suggestions about the specific individuals to be targeted.<sup>42</sup> No reply from Headquarters to (b)(3)(c) has been found. On 29 May 1954, however, the paramilitary chief requested the names of the "four men" he and the executive officer discussed assassinating. More than likely, the paramilitary chief wanted to take up the issue again with Castillo Armas. Again, no cable reply from Headquarters or LINCOLN has been found.<sup>43</sup> At the same time, LINCOLN continued compiling information on Arbenz's *finca* and lists of home addresses for individuals named on the "disposal list" drafted in April.<sup>44</sup> (b)(3)(c) believed Arbenz's *finca* was a "worthy target."<sup>45</sup> (b)(3)(c) (b)(3)(c)

In Washington (b)(3)(c) submitted a proposal on 1 June 1954 that suggested that, as an alternative approach to the paramilitary action program, "specific sabotage and possibly political assassination should be carefully worked out and effected."<sup>46</sup> (b)(3)(c)

(b)(3)(c) took up (b)(3)(c) suggestion in discussions with Henry Holland on 1 and 2 June. According to Wisner, Holland considered the proposal and then ruled it out, "at least for the immediate future," on the grounds that it would prove counterproductive. Holland wanted more specific plans concerning the individual targets, timing, and statement of purpose. Both Wisner and Holland agreed that the advantages gained by this type of activity needed to be

clearly spelled out.<sup>47</sup> This appears to be the end of serious planning in Washington for the inclusion of selective assassination proposals in PBSUCCESS. Returning from Washington to LINCOLN, on 2 June 1954, Barnes, however, reported to his staff that the consensus in Washington was that "Arbenz must go; how does not matter."<sup>48</sup> (s)

### The Paramilitary Operation

On 16 June 1954, Castillo Armas's CIA-supported force of armed exiles (b)(1) entered Guatemala. While these (b)(3)(c) forces advanced tentatively in the (b)(3)(c) hinterland (b)(3)(c) Guatemala City on 16 and 17 June met with a leading Guatemalan military commander, in the hopes of convincing him to lead a coup against Arbenz. In these discussions, the military commander hinted he would like to see (b)(3)(n)

(b)(3)(n) killed. The (b)(3)(c), frustrated by the continued inaction of the Guatemalan military commander, told him that if he wanted them killed he should do it himself. Despite the Guatemalan military commander's vacillation, a (b)(3)(c) cable indicated that he remained convinced that Arbenz had to be (b)(1) eliminated.<sup>49</sup> (s) (b)(3)(c)

With the Guatemala Army's position (b)(1) uncertain and the outcome still in (b)(3)(c) doubt, the (b)(3)(c) Nicaragua, requested permission a few days later to bomb the Presidential Palace and Arbenz's *finca*. LINCOLN responded on 22 June that it did not want to waste airstrikes on the *finca* or the palace while a battle was raging at Zacapa.<sup>50</sup> In a dramatic cable that ended "bomb repeat bomb,"<sup>51</sup> the (b)(3)(c) and the Ambassador also supported the paramilitary

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(b)(3)(c)

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chief's request to bomb the palace. LINCOLN and Headquarters held fast, and the palace was never bombed. "We do not take action with grave foreign policy implications except as an agent for the policymakers," Dulles cabled LINCOLN.<sup>52</sup> (S)

(b)(1)  
 (b)(3)(c) President Arbenz, on 27 June 1954, in an anti-American speech, resigned his office and sought asylum in the Mexican Embassy in Guatemala City. Even at that late date, [redacted] suggested that Arbenz should be killed.<sup>53</sup> After Castillo Armas assumed the presidency, however, Arbenz was allowed to leave the country for Mexico, where he was granted political asylum. In addition, 120 other Arbenz government officials or Communists departed Guatemala under a safe passage agreement with the Castillo Armas government.<sup>54</sup> There is no evidence that any Communist leaders were executed. (S)

### Conclusion

CIA officers responsible for planning and implementing covert action against the Arbenz government engaged in extensive discussions over a two-and-a-half-year period about the possibility of assassinating Guatemalan officials, including Arbenz himself. Consideration of using assassination to topple Arbenz and purge Guatemala of Communist influence was born of the extreme international tensions in the early Cold War years. The Agency did not act unilaterally, but it consulted with State Department officials with responsibility for policy toward Latin America. In the end, no assassinations of Guatemalan officials were carried out, according to all available evidence. (S)

Proposals for assassination pervaded both PBFORTUNE and PBSUCCESS, rather than being confined to an early stage of these programs. Even before official approval of PBFORTUNE, CIA officers compiled elimination lists and discussed the concept of assassination with Guatemalan opposition leaders. Until the day that Arbenz resigned in June 1954, the option of assassination was still being considered. (S)

Discussions of assassination reached a high level within the Agency. Among those involved were [redacted]

(b)(3)(c)

[redacted] was present at least one meeting where the subject of assassination came up. DCI Allen Dulles and his special assistant, Richard Bissell, probably were also aware in general terms that assassination was under discussion. Beyond planning, some actual preparations were made. Some assassins were selected, training began, and tentative "hit lists" were drawn up. (S)

Yet, no covert action plan involving assassinations of Guatemalans was ever approved or implemented. The official objective of PBSUCCESS was to remove the Guatemalan Government covertly "without bloodshed

if possible." Elimination lists were never finalized, assassination proposals remained controversial within the Agency, and it appears that no Guatemalans associated with Arbenz were assassinated. Both CIA and State Department officers were divided (and undecided) about using assassination. (S)

Discussion of whether to assassinate Guatemalan Communists and leaders sympathetic to Communist programs took place in a historical era quite different from the present. Soviet Communism had earned a reputation of using whatever means were expedient to advance Moscow's interests internationally. Considering Moscow's machinations in Eastern Europe, role in the Korean War, sponsorship of subversion through Communist surrogates in the Third World, and espousal of an ideology that seemed to have global hegemony as the ultimate objective, US officials and the American public alike regarded foreign Communist parties as Soviet pawns and as threatening to vital US security interests. (S)

Cold War realities and perceptions conditioned American attitudes toward what political weapons were legitimate to use in the struggle against Communism. It would be over two decades after the events in Guatemala before DCI William Colby prohibited any CIA involvement in assassination and a subsequent Executive Order banned any US Government involvement in assassination. (S)

### NOTES

1. The Historical Review Group, as part of CSI, reviewed these records for

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possible declassification and release under a selective subject release program. The Guatemalan records were originally pulled together by the Information, Privacy, and Classification Review Division for an FOIA request. For this request, Agency records were assembled from all the Directorates. (U)

2. This article, a previously classified review of Operation PBSUCCESS, and a large segment of the original records have been sanitized, declassified, and released to the National Archives and Records Administration. (U)
3. See Piero Gleijeses, *Shattered Hope: The Guatemalan Revolution and the United States, 1944-1954* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), pp. 187-88. United Fruit dominated Guatemalan banana production, controlled the International Railroad of Central America, and its merchant fleet had a virtual monopoly of Guatemalan overseas shipping. It was second only to the Guatemalan Government as an employer. (U)
4. See Gleijeses, *Shattered Hope* and Richard H. Immerman, *The CIA in Guatemala: The Foreign Policy of Intervention*, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1982) for general overviews of the Guatemalan situation in the early 1950s and US reaction. See also John Peurifoy, US Ambassador to Guatemala, statement of 23 October 1953 in Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States, The American Republic, 1950-1954*, 4:1039. (Hereinafter cited as *FRUS*). (U)
5. See PBSUCCESS Planning Documents, Directorate of Operations, Latin American Division Records, Job Number 79-101025A, CIA Archives (S). See also NSC 144/1, 18 March 1953, *FRUS* 4: 1-79 and J. C. King, memo for DDP, "Estimate of Situation in Guatemala," 11 January 1952 printed in Michael Warner, ed. *The CIA Under Harry Truman* (Washington, DC: Center for the Study of Intelligence, CIA, 1994), pp. 452-53. (U)
6. J. C. King, Chief, Western Hemisphere Division, dispatch, 22 March 1952, Box 7 (S).
7. See Bureau of Inter-American Affairs, "Alternative Policy Lines, 1953," and NSC, "Guatemala," 19 August 1953, *FRUS*, 4:1074-1086. (U)
8. See cable to Dulles, "Conference with...", 4 August 1952, Box 69. (S)
9. See memorandum to Dulles "Guatemalan Situation," 9 July 1952, Box 67 (S) and memorandum to Dulles, "Conference with...", 4 August 1952, Box 69. (S)
10. See King, "Chronology of Meetings Leading to Approval of Project A," 8 October 1952, Box 69 (S); to King, "Guatemala," 8 October 1952, Box 69 (S); and to Dulles, "Guatemala Situation," 9 July 1952, Box 69. (S)
11. See King, "Chronology of Meetings Leading to Approval of Project A." (S). See also Immerman, *CIA in Guatemala*, pp. 120-22. Because of security leaks and the boasting of General Somoza about his and the Agency's role in supporting the rebellion, PBFORTUNE was soon called off. Secretary of State Dean Acheson asked DCI Smith to stop the operation in October 1952. (U)
12. See [redacted] (b)(3)(c) [redacted] to [redacted] 26 January 1952, Box 7 (S). For a list of the names and biographical data see, Chief, Economic Warfare Operations, LINCOLN to All Staff Officers, "Selection of Individuals for Disposal by Junta Group," 31 March 1954, Box 145. (S)
13. Washington (b)(3)(c) [redacted] to [redacted] [redacted] 29 January 1952, Box 7. (S)
14. [redacted] (b)(3)(c) [redacted] to Headquarters, 29 January 1952, Box 10. (S)
15. See to King, "Guatemala Communist Personnel to be Disposed of During Military Operations of CALLIGERIS," (Castillo Armas), 18 September 1952, Box 134. (S)
16. See Report #3 to King, "Liaison between CALLEGERIS and General Trujillo of Santo Domingo," 18 September 1952, Box 134 (S). Assassination was a nasty but frequent tool of Guatemalan politics. Arbenz himself benefited from the killing of his archrival for the presidency, Francisco Arana, in 1949. (U)
17. See to King, memorandum, "Conference," 1 December 1952, Box 134. (S)
18. To King, memorandum, "Current Planning of CALLIGERIS Organization," 12 December 1952, Box 134 (S). See also, Acting Chief, Psychological Warfare Branch, Western Hemisphere Division, that reported in November 1952 that Castillo Armas was studying PW use of liquidation lists. Memorandum for the record, "PW Conference," 5 November 1952, Box 151 (S). The case officer also reported that the Arbenz government had targeted Castillo Armas for assassination. (S)
19. See [redacted] 30 March 1953, Box 150. (S) (b)(1) (b)(3)(c)
20. See King, memorandum, "Proposed Course of Action If Plan is Not Continued in Present Form"; undated but probably 1953, Box 154. (S)
21. Western Hemisphere Division, memorandum, "PBFORTUNE," 28 August 1953, Box 72. (S)
22. See King, memorandum to Dulles, "Guatemala—General Plan of Action," 11 September 1953, Box 5 (TS). See also the attached memorandum from Hans Tofte to King, 9 September 1953. (S)



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- (b)(1)  
(b)(3)(c)
23. See dispatch, [redacted] to LINCOLN, "Death Notices," 19 April 1954, Box 99. (S)
24. NSC Policy Paper, 19 August 1953, *FRUS* 4:1083. (U)
25. See King to Dulles, "Guatemala—General Plan of Action," Box 5 (TS) [redacted] Special Deputy for PBSUCCESS, memorandum for the record, "Program for PBSUCCESS," 12 November 1953, Box 135 (C). See also, memorandum to [redacted] "Summary of Directives and Instructions on PBSUCCESS," 5 November 1953, Box 142 (S).  
(b)(3)(c)
- (b)(1)  
(b)(3)(c)  
(b)(3)(n)
26. LINCOLN [redacted] for PBSUCCESS. See LINCOLN [redacted] to Headquarters, 5 January 1954, Box 1 (S) and LINCOLN [redacted] to Headquarters 6 January 1954, Box 1 (S). See also [redacted] to Headquarters, 9 March 1954, Box 13 (S); LINCOLN [redacted] to Headquarters, 4 January 1954, Box 1. (S)
27. See the paramilitary chief to Chief, LINCOLN (b)(3)(c), "CALLIGERIS Briefing Notes," 3 February 1954, Box 147 (S). See also, Chief, Technical Operations, Technical Services Staff, memorandum (b)(3)(c) "Cost of Support for PBSUCCESS," 27 September 1954, Box 43 (S). He listed the 20 silenced rifles. See also LINCOLN [redacted] to Headquarters, 6 January 1954, Box 75 (S) and LINCOLN [redacted] to Headquarters, 21 January 1954, Box 1. (S)
28. To King, Report #5, "Manuel Alfredo Pedroza G., " 18 September 1952, Box 73 (S) and paramilitary chief, memorandum for the record, "PM Conference Held at LINCOLN," 13 February 1954, Box 74 (S). See also LINCOLN [redacted] to Headquarters, 4 January 1954, Box 1 (S).  
(b)(3)(c)
- (b)(3)(c)
29. See LINCOLN [redacted] to Headquarters, 8 June 1954, Box 5 (S) or LINCOLN [redacted] to Headquarters, 8 June 1954, Box 5. (S) (b)(3)(c)
30. See to King, Report #22, "Current Planning of CALLIGERIS Organization," 12 December 1952, Box 134  
(b)(3)
31. See dispatch to [redacted] (b)(1) [redacted] Guatemala City, "Trainin(b)(3)(c) 6 June 1954, Box 75 (Secret, PBSUCCESS, Rybat). (S)
32. To LINCOLN, 26 May 1954, "Tactical Instructions (part II)," (S) and to LINCOLN, "Instructions' Nerve War Against Individuals," 9 June 1954, Box 50. (S)
33. See [redacted] Guatemala City, to Western Hemisphere Division, undated, (b)(1) Box 46 (C) and Guatemala City (b)(3)(c) LINCOLN, 14 May 1954. See (b)(1) also the [redacted] dispatch Guatemala City to LINCOLN, 14 May 1954 (b)(3)(c) Box 145 (S). SHERWOOD was the black radio propaganda program for PBSUCCESS. (S)
34. See King, memorandum for the record, "Weekly PBSUCCESS Meeting with DD/P," 9 March 1954, Box 154 (TS).  
(b)(1)  
(b)(3)(c)  
(b)(3)(n)
- 15 April 1954, Box 70 (S); King, memorandum for the record, "Meeting," 2 March 1954, Box 70. (S)
35. King, memorandum for the record, "Report of Mr. Thomas Mann on OAS Conference," 29 March 1954, Box 145. (S)
36. See Chief, Economic Warfare, LINCOLN, memo to All Staff Officers, "Selection of Individuals for Disposal by Junta Group," 31 March 1954, Box 145 (S). We know Dulles visited LINCOLN on this date from the LINCOLN visitors' log book. He signed into LINCOLN on 31 March. See LINCOLN Log Book for 31 March 1954, Box 138. (S)
37. Memorandum, Box 145. (S)
38. [redacted] (b)(1)  
(b)(3)(c)
39. Ydígoras Fuentes was living in exile in El Salvador, and the Agency was cultivating him as well as Castillo Armas. Arbenz had defeated Fuentes in the presidential election of December 1950. See memo to Barnes, "Summary of Operation," 18 April 1954, Box 134 (S). See also Dispatch, LINCOLN [redacted] (b)(1)  
(b)(3)(c)  
(b)(3)(n)
40. See memorandum for the record, "Synthesis of Ambassador Peurifoy's Remarks Relevant to PBSUCCESS Made at a Meeting 21 April 1954," 22 April 1954, Box 151. (S)
41. See executive officer, LINCOLN, memo to Barne(b)(3)(c) "Acts of Force Before D-Day," 16 May 1954, Box 142 (Secret. PBSUCCESS, Rybat). (b)(1)  
(b)(3)(c)

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(b)(1)  
(b)(3)(c)

[redacted]  
Box 145 (Secret, PBSUCCESS,  
Rybat). (S) (b)(3)(c)

42. See LINCOLN [redacted] to Director,  
21 May 1954, Box 4 (S) and  
LINCOLN [redacted] to Director. 21  
May 1954, Box 4. (S) (b)(3)(c)

43. See to Headquarters, 29 May 1954,  
Box 13 (S). Perhaps executive officer,  
LINCOLN, and chief paramilitary  
talked at a conference held at  
LINCOLN on 2 June 1954. See  
LINCOLN [redacted] (b)(3)(c)  
2 June 1954, Box 146 (Secret,  
PBSUCCESS, Rybat). (S)

(b)(1) See dispatch, [redacted] Guatemala to  
(b)(3)(c) LINCOLN, "K Program, Arbenz's  
rifica," 25 May 1954, Box 145  
(Secret PBSUCCESS, Rybat). (S)

45. See "Disposal List Home Addresses,"  
copied from an attachment to dis-  
patch, Guatemala [redacted] to  
(b)(1) LINCOLN, 1 June 1954, Box 145,  
(S). It contained 15 names. See also  
(b)(3)(c) LINCOLN routing slip for the  
attachment. (Dispatch dated 25 May  
1954), Box 145 (Secret, Rybat). (S)

46. See Barnes, draft memo, "Present Sta-  
tus and Possible Future Course of  
PBSUCCESS," 1 June 1954, Box  
145. (S)

47. Wisner, memorandum for the record,  
"Points Covered in H/W Discus-  
sions of June 1 and 2," 3 June 1954,  
Box 145 (S). This memo is originally  
from Job 00075R, Box 1, Folder 3.  
(S)

(b)(3)(c)  
48. See [redacted] 2 June 1954,  
Box 146 (Secret, PBSUCCESS,  
Rybat). See also Wisner, memoran-  
dum for the record, "Points Covered  
in H/W Discussion of June 1 and 2,"  
3 June 1954 and LINCOLN, note  
for the file, "Disposal List Prepared  
by C/EW," 1 June 1954, Box 145.  
(S)

49. See Guatemala City [redacted] to Head-  
quarters, 17 June 1954, Box 75 (S);  
Guatemala City [redacted] to Headquar-  
ters, 18 June 1954, Box 11 (S). See  
earlier Agency meetings with Guate-  
malan military leader, "First Meeting,  
4 May 1954, Dispatch, Guatemala  
City to LINCOLN, 1 June 1954,  
Box 134 (S); Dispatch, 11 June  
1954, Box 134 (S); and Dispatch  
Guatemala City to LINCOLN, (b)(1)  
May 1954, Box 154 (S). For [redacted] (b)(3)(c)  
[redacted] see Guatemala City [redacted] to  
LINCOLN, 24 June 1954, Box 153  
(Secret, PBSUCCESS, Rybat).

50. See [redacted] to LINCOLN, 14 June  
1954, Box 93 (Secret, PBSUCCESS,  
Rybat); Guatemala City [redacted] to  
(b)(3)(c) LINCOLN, 19 June 1954, Box 93  
(S); and LINCOLN [redacted] to Head-  
quarters, 22 June 1954, Box 93  
(Secret, PBSUCCESS, Rybat).

51. SHERWOOD [redacted] to LINCOLN, (b)(1)  
25 June 1954, Box 146 (S) and [redacted] (b)(3)(c)  
Guatemala City to Dulles, 19 June  
1954, Box 91. (S)

52. See Headquarters to LINCOLN,  
5857, 22 June 1954, Box 143. (S).

53. See Guatemala City [redacted] to LIN-  
COLN, 27 June 1954, Box 145  
(Secret, PBSUCCESS, RYBAT). (b)(3)(c)

54. John H. Waller, CIA Inspector Gen-  
eral, letter to Thomas Farmer,  
Chairman of the Intelligence Over-  
sight Board, 15 October 1979. (S)